

# How the Development of Islamic Boarding Schools Responds to the Challenges of the Technological Era

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## Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the possibility of Islamic boarding school educational institutions responding to technological and information advances that can give a new color to their existence in Indonesia. By the general public, Islamic Boarding Schools are still considered very backward in mastering technology, especially in the use of information technology for education. In fact, the potential for improvement exists when the National Education Commission Law No. 20 of 2003 article 30 paragraph 4, puts the position of Islamic boarding schools on a par with other educational institutions in Indonesia. Now, Islamic Boarding Schools are synonymous not only with educational institutions that teach religious sciences but also with the development of general science, including the use of information technology for education. Therefore, Islamic boarding schools should not waste this opportunity. Islamic Boarding Schools must always *update* the information they use. With information technology, Islamic Boarding Schools can be helped in disseminating information about profiles, activities, and management of Islamic Boarding Schools in human resource development and education.

## Keywords

Islamic boarding schools, education, the technological era

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## INTRODUCTION

Historically, Islamic boarding school education has emphasized more on the aspect of developing Islamic education (*salaḥ*). In Islamic boarding schools, Islamic education is more dominantly given than general education, because Islamic boarding schools are educational institutions that teach various theories developed from hypotheses or insights sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith. Even so, in that place, yellow books (*kitab kuning*) are also taught that can equip students to develop Islamic education/Islamic boarding schools of the Indonesian model (Arifin, 2000: 7).

Education in Islamic boarding schools emphasizes the establishment of a relationship between humans and God and humans and teachings about the relationship between the world and the hereafter which is based on the Qur'an and the sunnah as a source of reference (Rahman, 2005: 11). Meanwhile, judging from its institutional role, it is a sub-system of national education and has historically made a significant contribution to the progress of Islamic civilization in Indonesia. As an indigenous educational institution (typical of Indonesia), Islamic Boarding Schools have strong *socio-historical* roots, so that it is able to occupy a relatively central position in the scientific world of Indonesian society, as well as survive and adapt to the waves of changing times. Such is the great role of Islamic boarding

schools in building the history of Indonesian nationality. Many national and even international figures were born in the Islamic boarding school environment, such as K.H. Hasyim Asyari, Wahid Hasyim, and Natsir. This proves that Islamic boarding schools have the strength and strategic ability to produce quality human beings, who have broad knowledge, forward-thinking, and strong national insight (Baso, 2012: 163-183).

The issuance of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Sisdiknas) provides considerable opportunities for the development of Islamic boarding schools. The reason is that the law has eliminated discrimination against religious education that has been going on so far. Concretely, early education and Islamic Boarding Schools have been recognized as a form of religious education (article 30 paragraph 4 of the National Education System Law of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Indonesia). Thus, some people believe that the fate of this original and oldest educational institution in Indonesia will be "better". There is a tendency that now the national education bureaucracy to no longer marginalize Islamic Boarding Schools from the mainstream of its policies.

Regarding the application of information and communication technology (ICT), for Islamic boarding school education still seems to be ignored both in terms of policy and treatment in the field, in this postmodern era, information technology is a very important part of human life, including in Islamic boarding schools. Nowadays, information is a "primary commodity" that people need, along with the increasing sophistication of information and communication technology. Therefore, today's civilization is an information society civilization so this century is called the information age. By looking at its development, the existence of information technology is an inevitable thing. Islamic Boarding Schools as an educational institution that has a very large influence on the community need information and communication technology so that the relationship between Islamic Boarding Schools and the community is more harmonious, effective, and conveyed accurately and quickly.

The distinctive Indonesian nature/indigenouness of Islamic Boarding Schools in contrast to other educational practices in general causes Islamic Boarding Schools to display a distinctive and exotic character. In the era of globalization like today, Islamic boarding schools are required to accelerate quickly in various aspects, as a logical consequence of the implementation of *high-tech*, causing the Indonesian nation to be led into a pattern of very fast and massive interaction with other countries in the world. In this phase of the information society, Islamic Boarding Schools are increasingly facing challenges that are not light and more complex than in previous eras. For this reason, a breakthrough is needed to start introducing and applying information and communication technology in Islamic boarding schools and madrasas through various appropriate methods. Therefore, it is necessary to use information technology that can be applied in Islamic boarding schools as educational institutions in the community that can provide opportunities for the progress of the Indonesian Nation.

## **METHOD**

This research is a qualitative research of the type of literature research. This research wants to explore the possibility of Islamic boarding school educational institutions responding to technological and information advances that can give a new color to their existence in Indonesia. A number of relevant literature is used as a basis for discussion,

especially books that record the historical side of the existence of Islamic boarding schools and their development over time.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **About Islamic Boarding Schools**

It is not clear when the Islamic Boarding Schools were first established and who used the words *kiai* and *santri*. Everything is still under debate, but it is not something negative it indicates that Islamic Boarding Schools have long been attached to Javanese/Indonesian society. In Steenbrink's view, Islamic Boarding Schools in terms of their form and system originated in India, because before Islam developed in Indonesia, the Islamic Boarding Schools system, in general, had been used in Hindu education and teaching in Java. After Islam developed in Java, the system was adopted by Islam into Islamic boarding schools. Thus, judging from the form between Hindu education and Islamic Boarding Schools, there is a similarity in origin and treatment, such as the handover of land from the state for religious interests. The Islamic Boarding school education system is not found in the original education system of Makah (Nur Syam, 2005: 93). However, the pattern of Islamic boarding school education using Arabic can also be found in Baghdad when the city became the center of Islamic culture. Therefore, the tradition of land handover by the state which later became the *waqf* system was present in the region (Yunus, 1995: 31).

In Indonesia, especially in Java, Islamic Boarding school education cannot be separated from the role of Wali Sanga who lived around the 15th-16th centuries and spread Islam in the land of Java. Maulana Malik Ibrahim is known as the "*spiritual father*" of Wali Songo. In the tradition of Javanese students, he is usually seen as a *syaikhul masyayikh*. Wali Songo is a figure who spreads Islam and has succeeded in combining various orders of Javanese life with Islamic spiritual values (Mas'ud, 2002: 3). The students of Java are of the view that Wali Songo is a very pious leader of the people and with their spiritual-religious enlightenment, the Javanese earth who initially did not know the religion of monotheism (Islam) came to know and embrace him.

Islamic Boarding Schools with all its traditions of education, teaching, and character development institutionally take local religious traditions such as Animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Meanwhile, substantially the existing institutions are adapted to Islamic teachings by accommodating local religious teachings that do not contradict Islamic teachings. This was done by Wali Songo as a "cultural Islam" movement. This movement in the process took a long and gradual period of time which was then continued by their students, and in the end, became a substitute and successor to the Islamization of the land of Java in the form of the establishment of Islamic boarding schools. This cultural Islamic movement is carried out by emphasizing a sense of coexistence, peace, unity and unity, stability, and harmony with the surrounding community. In subsequent developments, Islamic Boarding Schools grew and developed throughout Indonesia with various cultural characteristics, so there were *salafiyah* (old) Islamic Boarding Schools and *khalafiyah* (new or modern) Islamic Boarding Schools.

The teaching of Islamic sciences in Islamic boarding schools is generally carried out through the recitation of classical Islamic books. However, in some Islamic boarding schools, especially *khalafiyah* Islamic boarding schools, the teaching of Islamic sciences, although some use Arabic books, is not classified as classical books. Classical Islamic books, more popularly

known as the Yellow Book, were written by medieval Islamic scholars. The intelligence and proficiency of a student are measured by his ability to read and explain (*syarh*) the content of the books. In order to be able to read and understand a book, a student is required to first understand and master the sciences of tools or aids such as *nahwu*, *sharaf*, *balaghah*, *ma'ani*, and *bayan*. The books taught between one Islamic Boarding School and another are different, because Islamic Boarding Schools have various variations of Islamic teaching, as well as adjusted to their own characteristics (Anwar, 2003: 75). There are Islamic boarding schools that are known to specialize in teaching monotheism, but there are also those that stand out in the field of tafsir-hadith. There are also Islamic boarding schools that focus on *takhasus*, both fiqh or shari'ah, *nahwu*, and *sharaf*. There are also so-called Sufism Islamic boarding schools, and there are even those who specialize in *falaq sciences*. Lately, there are Islamic boarding schools with new specializations such as: agriculture, carpentry, service skills, cooperatives and environmental conservation.

The books studied include *tafsir*, *hadith*, *fiqh*, *ushul fiqh*, and sufism ranging from thin to thick. All of these are classified into three groups, namely: 1) basic books, 2) intermediate books, and (3) large books (Dhofier, 1990: 50-51). Books that are classified as elementary and intermediate levels, are submitted to/taught by the ustadz or *badal* (assistants) of the kiai. While those classified as large or high-level books, the kiai themselves teach them.

In the learning process, students usually use the translated term "beard". This form of translation is always written in Javanese with the Arabic letter "*pegon*" written dangling under the original Arabic text. This pattern is used almost throughout Indonesia, including those who do not speak Javanese, such as Madura and Sundanese (Dhofier, 1990: 309). This translation tradition is still practiced in *Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools*. This is done so that the kiai/teacher has an *isnad* (knowledge connection) so that it is known through which path the students have studied the yellow book. The pattern of translating the yellow book typical of Islamic boarding schools proves that the validity of the *Salafiyah Islamic boarding school* lies in the authority of the transmission of knowledge from the kiai to the students. For *Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools*, the recitation of the yellow book is absolutely carried out. This is not the case with Islamic boarding schools that are classified as modern. For modern Islamic boarding schools, the recitation of the yellow book is not a priority, and some even do not teach at all.

The study of religious sciences is taken from Arabic books written by scholars who are classified as *cutting-edge* (not compiled in the Middle Ages). For example, Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Ponorogo, an Islamic Boarding School preaches itself as a modern Islamic Boarding School, as well as the Wali Songo Ngabar Ponorogo Islamic Boarding School, is classified as a modern Islamic Boarding School. In these Islamic Boarding Schools, Islamic religious lessons are not based on the yellow book, but most of them are sourced from books written by scholars classified as the 20th century. The books are written using Arabic so the students are required to have the ability to understand and master the rules of the Arabic language, so the ability to explore and master the rules of the Arabic language is an absolute requirement to understand the content of these books.

Historically, Islamic Boarding Schools are not only synonymous with the meaning of Islam but also contain the meaning of Indonesian authenticity (*indigenous*), because, institutions similar to these Islamic Boarding Schools have actually existed since the time of Hindu-Buddhist rule, namely padepokan. The spreaders of Islam only need to continue and

Islamize existing educational institutions (Majid, 1997: 3). In Indonesia, the term *kuttab* is better known as Islamic boarding schools, namely as Islamic educational institutions, in which there is a *kiai* (educator) using a mosque as a place to hold education, and supported by the existence of a boarding school (dormitory) as a place for students to live (Mukti, 1987: 323).

The dormitory system is a characteristic of the Islamic Boarding School education tradition, which distinguishes it from the traditional education system in mosques that are developing in Indonesia. The area of the Islamic Boarding Schools complex was originally owned by a single *kiai*, but in line with the development of the times it gradually changed into a foundation, a *waqf* body or a community. Even so, the *kiai* still have absolute power over the management of the Islamic Boarding Schools complex. Each student has the opportunity to learn directly from the *kiai* or his assistant, through *sorogan*. This system is usually given in recitation to students who have mastered the reading of the Qur'an. This is the most difficult part because this system requires patience, craftsmanship, obedience, and discipline of students. Students should already understand this level of *sorogan* before they can take part in further education at Islamic boarding schools (Dhofier, 1982: 28).

As an Islamic educational institution, Islamic Boarding Schools basically only teach Islamic religious sciences. Religious lessons studied at Islamic boarding schools include; (1) the Qur'an and its *makhraj*, *tajwid*, and *tafsir*, (2) *fiqh* and the science of *ushul fiqh*, (3) *aqa'id* and the science of *kalam*, (4) *hadith* and *mustholah hadith*, (5) Arabic with its grammatical knowledge such as *nahwu*, *sharaf*, *bayan*, *ma'ani*, *badi'* and *'arudh*, (6) *date*, (7) *matiq*, (8) *Sufism* (Dhofier, 1982).

The teaching method in Islamic Boarding Schools is known as *sorogan*, *wetonan* and memorization. The delivery is by translating the books into Javanese and then the material is memorized. The *wetonan* method is also called *bandongan*. Both are lecture methods where students follow lessons by sitting (*lesehan*) around the *kiai* who reads and explains the contents of the book. The students listened to their respective books, and made notes in the blank sections on the pages of the books (Mas'ud: 2001: 10 and Dhofier, 1990: 201).

The role of Islamic boarding schools in building Indonesian society is very large, especially at the grassroots. Therefore, the modernization process of the Indonesian community and nation will be faster if it is spearheaded by Islamic boarding schools. Innovations in various aspects such as curriculum, infrastructure, education personnel (administrative employees), teachers, management (management), evaluation systems, and technology must continue to be carried out together by all elements of society. Islamic boarding schools do not only belong to Muslims but also to all components of the Indonesian nation. If these aspects do not receive serious and proportionate attention, adjusting to the demands of the times (modernized), then the existence of Islamic boarding schools will be threatened. Islamic Boarding Schools can no longer compete in the present or in the future. That way, the development of Islamic Boarding Schools education is not only carried out by incorporating non-religious knowledge, but in order to be more effective and efficient, teaching practices must also apply newer and modern methodologies. Because, when the didactic methods applied are still centered on old methods that are outdated, it is difficult for Islamic Boarding Schools to compete with other educational institutions.

### **Islamic Boarding Schools in the Age of Technology and Information**

In the 21st Century, nations in the world are competing to develop various strategic technologies. The impact of this technological development has caused economic competition on the one hand to become sharper and on the other hand to be more widespread. This situation is a result of the rapid development of information technology and transportation which makes it easier for countries to access business, industrial, and technological information. The development of increasingly sophisticated technology and the increasingly rapid circulation and expansion of capital flows allow many people to own, buy, and use it, even though they are still not able to master or develop the technology themselves. Opportunities to utilize and master technology and business can also be achieved by developing countries, including Indonesia. Since the 1980s, technological advances and rapid industrial growth in various fields have impacted and dramatically changed our conceptual understanding of distance, time, culture, lifestyle, and behavior.

Because the interaction between nations is increasing, access to new values, especially cultural values from outside Indonesian society, is getting greater. The national economy is also increasingly open to the development of the world economy and its impact is very felt, especially on an increasingly competitive life. Meanwhile, the natural resources owned by the Indonesian nation are very limited, and human resources are not competitive. The monetary crisis that befell Indonesia and several other countries referred to as the Asian crisis even now in Europe, is also a result of economic openness/globalization.

In this new era (information and technology), Indonesia has transformed several aspects of social and cultural life as quickly as possible and as basically as possible, including in the field of technology. The process of transformation from the old era to the new era has been combined with the renewal process, known as reform. Reform is a form of correction of mistakes in the past in order to look forward to a newer and more promising future. However, if this nation is not careful in managing these changes, there will be major clashes that can damage the nation's values that have been well maintained so far, such as the spirit of unity and unity. Here, the role of religion in underpinning the life of the nation and state is very important, especially in order to stem values that are contrary to the culture and personality of the Indonesian nation that has been formed and tested for a long time. These changes demand a strong mental attitude, a high level of participation, productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency from all levels of society. This shows that the demand for the development of increasingly qualified and resilient human resources, who are able to anticipate the changes that occur and overcome their excesses is increasingly urgent to be met. The fulfillment of quality human resources has an impact on the speed of accessing and processing information and utilizing technology for the benefit of nation-building.

The existence of the internet in Islamic boarding schools makes it easier for students to access information and knowledge. Accessing a number of information and science should not be a taboo thing for Islamic boarding schools anymore. Students who have been equipped with various knowledge and appreciation of morals should be better prepared to face the negative impact of the internet than other students in general. The Sufism device that he has should be a kind of natural filter that wards off various negative information from the internet.

Libraries are one of the most expensive sources of information. The existence of the Internet allows Islamic Boarding Schools activities to run well, including providing



assistance in final project research among students and students. Exchanging information or questions and answers with experts can be done through the internet either through *facebook, emails, twitter and blogs*.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has revolutionized the way of human life, the way of communicating, learning, working, and doing business to be very practical, effective, and efficient. The information age provides a very large scope to be able to organize all activities through new, innovative, instantaneous, transparent, accurate, timely, and better ways and provide more comfort in managing and enjoying life, including in Islamic boarding schools. One of the benefits felt by Islamic Boarding Schools is the demand for improving the quality and quality of learning implementation because it is supported by various facilities that mostly use information and communication technology (Pannen P, 2005: 29).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) exists as a form of response to changes in the environment outside the world of education, ranging from the social, economic, technological, to political environment, which requires the world of education to rethink how these changes affect it as a social institution and how to interact with these changes so as not to be left behind with issues originating from the outside environment. With the presence of ICT, the spread of information becomes faster and may become uncontrollable, if there are no rules that limit which information can and should be accessed by the public, and which information is not. The rapid dissemination of this information has changed the human mindset as a form of response to the rapid dissemination of information (Mohandas, R. 2003: 25-27). If examined more deeply, the extent of ICT intervention in the Islamic Boarding Schools education sector, a question will arise, namely how ICT has actually reformed or modernized Islamic Boarding School education, so that the quality and quality of Islamic Boarding Schools can be better compared to conventional education.

There are three important things that must be rethought in relation to modernization in the Islamic Boarding Schools education system: (1) how we learn (*how people learn*); (2) what *people learn*; (3) where and *when people learn*. Resnick (2002). By observing these three questions and the potential of IT that can be used to modernize Islamic boarding schools, he must always *update* the information they use. In addition, with information technology, Islamic Boarding Schools can be assisted in disseminating information about the profile, activities, and management of Islamic Boarding Schools in human resource development and education. In order for the world of Indonesian education to be included in the development of human resources and for Islamic Boarding School education can be more developed and advanced, the government through Jardiknas (National Education Network) and ICT Center can open the widest access to information related to education and provide opportunities for all Indonesian children to participate in proper and quality education, as well as provide empowerment to students in the learning process. by providing free student-centered learning/e-learning.

The IT program at the Islamic Boarding Schools is in line with the Jardiknas program launched by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in March 2007. This internet-based network is intended to connect 533 centers in 33 provinces, 441 cities/districts, and more than 3,600 high schools, more than 84 universities, and 61 education offices across the country. Until now, internet networks have been developed in 10 provinces in Java, West Sumatra, South Kalimantan, Bali, and South Sumatra. The network has been installed in 25%

of all high schools/vocational schools/Madrasah Aliyah throughout Indonesia. At the university level, a certain network has been built under the name Inherent (*Indonesian Higher Education Network*). A wide spectrum of problems ranging from educators and students to school rehabilitation, to geographical conditions has indeed encouraged the development of ICT-based networks, including in Islamic boarding schools.

Indonesia is the fourth largest country in the world with 247 million people and a diversity of ethnicities, geography, and local languages with 17 thousand islands. This condition has paved the way for the exchange and transmission of knowledge, perspectives, and experiences by utilizing ICT. Therefore, distance education for the transformation of Islamic society through Islamic boarding schools will help expand the scope of the government's National Education Agency.

Consciously or not, information is not only a necessity but can also be a source of strength. Information technology can be the most important tool to manipulate life as well as a tool of control. Whoever controls the information is the ruler of the future. In the hands of a few people believe that the new power of society is not money, but information in the hands of many people. The forms of information technology that are widely used by humans today include computers and other devices such as the internet (bandwidth, network, wireless, hardware, and software).

That is information technology, especially computers and the internet which are an important part of our lives, including for the development of Islamic boarding schools. The role of information technology is needed by Islamic boarding schools and can be used as a medium for information and communication automation. Technology can also make the learning process easier. Dismissing the notion that students and Islamic Boarding Schools are stuttering towards technological advances, some responded and anticipated it by responding with a statement that the future cyberspace era has become a necessity. After all, Islamic Boarding Schools are not *camps* that must be sterile or closed from outside access. In turn, Islamic Boarding Schools within certain limits will need to be known for accountability and transparency of their activities by stakeholders. It is also necessary to maintain public trust in Islamic boarding schools.

Islamic boarding school institutions from the past to the present or in the future are still believed to play a positive role in adapting and even changing the times. Islamic Boarding Schools are a "*center of excellence*" or a center where the learning process of the next generation takes place in Islamic sciences with its distinctive methods. Here, the kiai as a central figure (as teachers, parents, supervisors, education organizers, and Islamic Boarding School owners) are willing to sacrifice without demanding anything in return from anyone. Islamic Boarding Schools can be a low-cost educational alternative, which is able to form the independence of individuals and communities, regardless of the allocation of the APBD/APBN. By itself, Islamic Boarding Schools became very autonomous from unclear outside influences. In terms of ownership of Islamic information and communication resources, Islamic boarding schools have reliable authorities. Islamic boarding schools have a clear sanad path and can be accounted for in their validity.

Islamic boarding schools also play a role as a "*center of social change*", namely an agent or center for community change. The system (*input-procces-output-feedback*) in Islamic Boarding Schools can be expected to produce high social-added value. In Islamic boarding schools, religion, ideology, politics, society, economy, culture, law and defense, and even appropriate technology are



all studied. Thus, Islamic Boarding Schools can be expected to be a vehicle for improving human quality by trying to alleviate poverty, ignorance, and environmental awareness, and maintaining morals or commendable morals that are rare as a result of the negative influence of changing times. Islamic Boarding Schools not only train individual piety but also social so that systemically it can provide a *multiplier effect* and *competitive advantage*.

## CONCLUSION

Education in Islamic boarding schools, judging from its history, has undergone many changes, especially in terms of producing scientists/scholars both in terms of religion and general knowledge. The development of the times and the advancement of information technology can slowly change the paradigm of Islamic boarding schools which are now much more sensitive to changes and developments in science. In the policy aspect, certain articles show that there is a defense of the Islamic Boarding Schools education system in the context of national education (National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003). In carrying out its role, Islamic Boarding Schools seek to advance science, information, and communication technology. All are used to support the smooth management process of the Islamic Boarding Schools and improve the positive image of the institution. Although information technology in cyberspace is very risky when not managed properly, it is urgently needed by Islamic boarding schools. It all depends on the attitude of humans as the culprit. Information technology is a means or *washilah* that based on its purpose is created to create the benefits of religion, intellect, soul, property, and posterity/generations in the future. This new vision can strongly inspire the existence of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia to produce a generation that is intelligent and responsive to the progress of science and world civilization. Islamic boarding schools are very complex educational institutions in the context of science, society, culture, nation, and the universe.

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